

EARLY CNC_o SAILINGS TO THE ANTIPODES.

The Formative Years. 1882 ~ 1887.

In the beginning;

1882 was a vintage year, it was in the good old days of Queen Victoria's empire when soldiers wore red coats and the Navy was ruled by rum and the lash. It was also the year when CNC_o decided to venture "Down Under" to the colonies south of the Line. The growing trade between China and the eastern states of Australia appeared to suggest promising prospects for a profitable enterprise thus with well oiled cash registers at the ready CNC_o rolled up it's sleeves, built the ships, organised the agents and set the ball rolling to focus on providing a regular, reliable shipping service that would be attractive to both cargo and passenger interests. Several lines were already established in the trade, so as a latecomer CNC_o put its wallet where it mouth was and took the initiative to provide a product that enabled them to better the competition. According to newspaper reports of the day they succeeded admirably.

In the 19th century, colonial newspapers provided their readers with detailed shipping news awash with information, details of voyages and cargoes that make fascinating reading even today, and it is from these that a picture of CNC_o, its ships, cargoes and service emerge from the shadows. These were the days when the ports were bustling with deep sea sailing ships, early steamers and coastal vessels of various shapes, sizes and descriptions, a marvellous maritime medley. No doubt worldly wise reporters, like agents, would time their ship visits during the highlight of the nautical day, - gin time, - when tongues were suitably loosened, and pick up happenings of the voyage and any interesting events that may have occurred. Some of the sailing ship accounts make enthralling reading but of course not all the voyages proved to be a thrill a minute and fortunately most (but not all) the CNC_o reports were relatively routine and often were little more than a blow by blow account of the weather during the trip down from China. As most of the early steamers were equipped with some sails and most of the deck officers had cut their teeth in square riggers, weather was important factor in their lives and it is quite likely that sails were often used when wind and weather proved suitable. The speed would be enhanced, bunker consumption reduced and the engineers annoyed..

Southbound cargoes. The early catalyst for the China to Australia and New Zealand trades was tea from China, particularly during northern summer months when the "new season's tea" from Foochow became available. This movement declined in later years when the taste for Indian tea eclipsed China tea in the colonial teapots. These initial tea tonnages to both sides of the Tasman were boosted by smaller quantities of sugar, rice and a mysterious exotica rejoicing under the name of "chow chow" cargo. No doubt "chow chow" filled the shelves of the Woolworths of the day. As time went by, more and more fascinating commodities popped up on the lists of cargo from Asia, - spices, tapioca and sago from Singapore; and rice, salted eggs, soy, preserved ginger, opium, (yes opium!) cigars, lacquer ware, camphor wood, &c. from China and Hong Kong. The local Chinese communities must have looked forward to the regular arrival of their "goodies." Also as time went by, tonnages of Australian sugar grew, an unusual two-way trade of raw sugar northbound to the refineries in Hong Kong,

including presumably Taikoo, and the processed product returned southbound to satisfy the taste buds of the colonial population.

Southbound tonnages, but not revenues, were invariably but unofficially boosted by the smuggling activities of the Chinese crews, variously described in the decidedly politically incorrect newspapers of the day as '*Celestials*', '*Chinkees*' or '*Mongolians*,' which kept the customs officers on their toes in ports around the coast. Stories of misshapen crew members being apprehended with large quantities of cigars secreted around their person, in their clothing and even in their pigtails must have provided the readers, - if not the local magistrates, with some amusement.

Northbound cargoes. There was a definite dearth of significant northbound general cargoes from Australia or New Zealand thus the ships would supplement their earnings by loading tonnages of bulk coal destined for Hong Kong, picked up either in Newcastle NSW, - or in the case of New Zealand, West Coast coal loaded in Wellington or the South Island. Most of the vessels engaged in the China / Australasian trades, CNCo or otherwise, regularly lifted quite large tonnages of coal, 1,000 to 2,000 tons each trip. No doubt opportunity would be taken to replenish their own bunkers but the rest was landed in Hong Kong for other purposes. Captain Fawcett of the 'Whampoa' proved to be an enthusiastic advocate of the superior qualities of New Zealand coal, even to the extent of leaving his ship in Wellington for an inspection of the loading facilities in Westport on the west coast of the South Island. It is worth recording that he recommended direct calls there, claiming that the high grade coal would be in great demand around Asia for the 'Whampoa' "*steams one knot per hour faster with a consumption of 17 tons than when consuming 19 tons supplied from China.*" At the risk of appearing partisan no such comments were made about the Newcastle coal. Be that as it may, some small lines of strange or unlikely items did feature regularly on the loading lists such as horseshoes, scrap, beche-de-mer, fungus and gold.

A useful supplement to earnings was the ability to carry cargo and passengers on sections of the Australian coast and from New Zealand ports across to Australia. This was later curtailed and finally stopped by industrial pressure in reaction to the perceived use of cheap Asian crews.

The service (s). The ships running to Australia also made a number of ad hoc trips to New Zealand with "new season's tea", of which there were 15 between 1883 and 1890. This seems to have been considered simply opportunistic and as an adjunct to the Australian main line service rather than a separate trade altogether.

The honour of the first 'toe in the water' sailing to Australia fell to the 'Tamsui', which arrived in Sydney from Hong Kong on the 4th August 1882 with a cargo of new season's tea plus rice and little else. After discharging the remainder of this cargo in Melbourne she returned to China after loading 1400 tons of coal in Newcastle.

The following year, 'Hoihow' made the introductory sailing into New Zealand, arriving in Wellington on 29th July 1883. After discharging her cargo of 'new seasons' tea, the 'Hoihow' managed to successfully hit the headlines on both sides of the Tasman, when she loaded some 250 coffins in Dunedin containing the remains of '*defunct*' Chinese for reburial in the '*Flowery Land*.' Headlines of '*A gruesome cargo*,' '*A cargo of corpses*,' '*A horrible cargo*,' were not perhaps the best advertising CNCo would have chosen for any introductory sailing. Later in the voyage, on arrival

in Sydney, the Australian authorities discovered that some of the so called defunct Chinese remains were rather 'ripe' thus creating significant official displeasure and quarantine problems. Hoihow was perhaps fortuitously the only sailing to the 'Land of the Long White Cloud' (or should it be Shroud?) that year.

It was in 1883, when the newer and larger 'Whampoa' arrived, that the Australian service really commenced, on what would prove to be a regular service pattern, with Port Darwin as first port, thence Thursday Island, Cooktown, Townsville, Brisbane, all 'blink and you miss them' calls for passengers and capfuls of cargo, before carrying on to Sydney and Melbourne where the vast bulk of the cargo was destined. These ports were later extended to include Adelaide as and when cargo volumes dictated. The northbound leg of the service then called in Newcastle for coal, thence Sydney again before resuming the voyage with brief stops back at the Queensland ports again and finally departing from Darwin bound deep sea for China.

On this first occasion the Whampoa had also loaded cargoes for Australia in Singapore as well as Hong Kong, a pattern that would continue over a number of sailings during 1884 and 1885, whilst most of the major tea movements were loaded in Foochow.

During the balance of 1883, there were a further four direct sailings to Australia by what was intended to be the regular service ships, - 'Changchow', 'Taiwan' and 'Woosung', plus a second voyage of 'Whampoa'. These steamers, all sister ships, were built on the Clyde by Scotts of Greenock the previous year with the Australian trade in mind. The newspapers were effusive in their praise of the smart appearance and cleanliness of these ships, as well as their up to date equipment and efficiency. So it would seem CNCo's new service got off to a flying start.

In 1884 there were 17 CNCo sailings to Australia. These were all made by the four sister ships, now considered as regulars on the run, but with additional assistance on occasions from the smaller 'Hoihow' plus her sisters 'Keelung' and 'Tamsui'.

On the New Zealand scene the 'Tamsui' made the second trip down in July 1884, again with 'new seasons tea' from Foochow, before returning to China via Australia to pick up additional northbound cargo. Shortly afterwards the Changchow crossed over to New Zealand from Australia, transporting Chariani's Circus from Melbourne to Auckland, no doubt an interesting cargo for the ship's officers. On her return trip to Hong Kong, the Changchow suffered the misfortune of running aground off the Queensland coast in October and became a total loss. This was not the only bad news CNCo incurred this year for in July 'Taiwan' had experienced an eventful trip, firstly running aground on a reef near Darwin. After a white knuckle fortnight she was refloated without apparent damage, which said much for the shipbuilding skills of Scotts of Greenock. However a few days later she struck yet another reef, this time near Cooktown, causing some leaks. Finally she then endeavoured to demolish the Story Bridge in Brisbane when she arrived for a much needed dry dock. All this perils of the sea stuff took place within the space of five weeks so it could not be considered an outstanding trip. Then just to cap it all, the Tamsui broke her tail shaft off Newcastle in October and had to be towed into Sydney for repairs. So perhaps it can be said that 1884 was a not year that CNCo would wish to remember fondly. All was not doom and gloom however for in August 'Whampoa' received well deserved accolades for an interesting side trip from Darwin around the northern coast carrying

an exploration party complete with horses and supplies to the Cambridge Gulf where they were to survey the little known Kimberly district for settlement.

The following year, 1885, proved to be a quieter one for CNCo's nerves, but due to the loss of 'Changchow' there were only twelve voyages made to Australia. New Zealand was served by a return trip across the Tasman by the Whamboa in September, preceded by a direct call by the 'Tamsui' with tea from Foochow, which again returned northbound via Australia.

Fifteen voyages were made to Australia in 1886 including two to New Zealand's sunny shores by the 'Tamsui' and 'Whamboa' with the usual cargo of 'new season's tea' to replenish the colonial tea cups once more. The 'Soochow' joined the three regular service vessels for two trips during the latter half of the year. This proved to be the final year for the 'old team' for in January 1887, 'Changsha' the first of four newly built, larger and faster vessels appeared. She was followed by her sisters 'Chingtu', 'Taiyuan' and 'Tsinan', on the by now familiar and well established service.

Passengers. By today's standards all these early steamers were small and conditions on board quite primitive, particularly when large numbers of fare paying Chinese passengers found their way up the gangway. According to reports in 1885 'Taiwan' even managed to cram aboard 379 Chinese hoping to make their fortunes in Australia, it must have been standing room only. They were carried down in the 'tween decks and probably enjoyed a miserable time on deck too, during a passage of some three weeks. Food, water and hygiene must have given the overworked crews with quite a headache, particularly during bad weather.

The New Zealand government, like their counterparts in the various Australian states, had reflected public concern and animosity towards the large scale movement of Chinese into their regions.

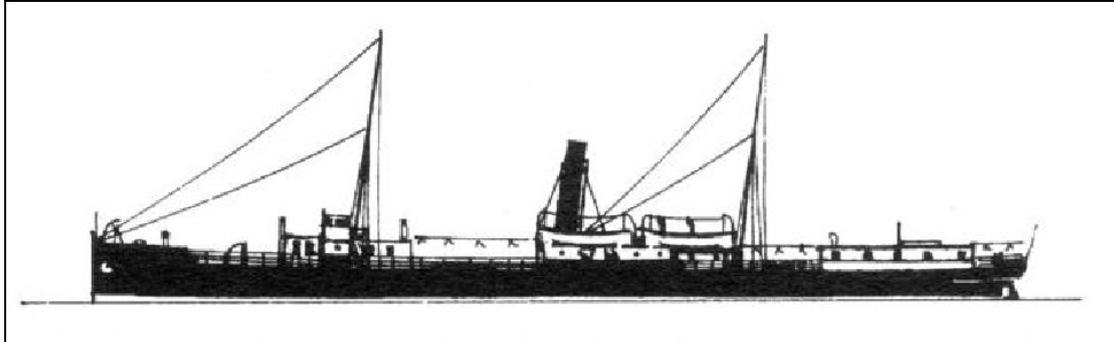
After all the Chinese possessed, a different appearance, a different language, different eating habits, - in short they were noticeably different, - but worst of all they worked too hard thus jeopardising jobs for the local population. So a poll tax of £10 was imposed on these immigrants, the first to restrict the entry of a specific group of people. In 1881 the number of Chinese without naturalisation papers that could enter on any one ship, was limited to one person for every 10 tons of the vessel's weight. In later years these rules became even more stringent to further limit the number of Chinese. This obviously had a negative effect on passenger revenues as numbers dwindled but with the arrival of Changsha and her sisters, CNCo's sights turned towards providing superior, even luxurious passenger accommodation complete with a piano and a ladies boudoir, in major move to attract affluent European passengers.

The Ships.

The newspapers published some interesting information about the ships when they first appeared on the scene. This information was presumably either seen through gin clouded layman's eyes but with more finite detail provided by the ships officers themselves. One particular frustration has been the lack of photographs of many of these ships during this fascinating period, particularly of the 'Whamboa', 'Woosung', 'Taiwan' and 'Changchow'. A picture of the latter vessel arriving in Auckland, it's decks awash with the elephants and giraffes of Charini's Circus would have been a well worthwhile one for the Boardroom wall. Strange to relate pictures of some of the earlier sailing ships the CNCo masters and officers had served on, are available, but

perhaps they were regarded as more photogenic than the early steamers for it wasn't until the arrival of the graceful Changsha and her sisters that photographs became more readily available.

Tamsui, Hoihow & Keelung.



Tamsui, Hoihow & Keelung.

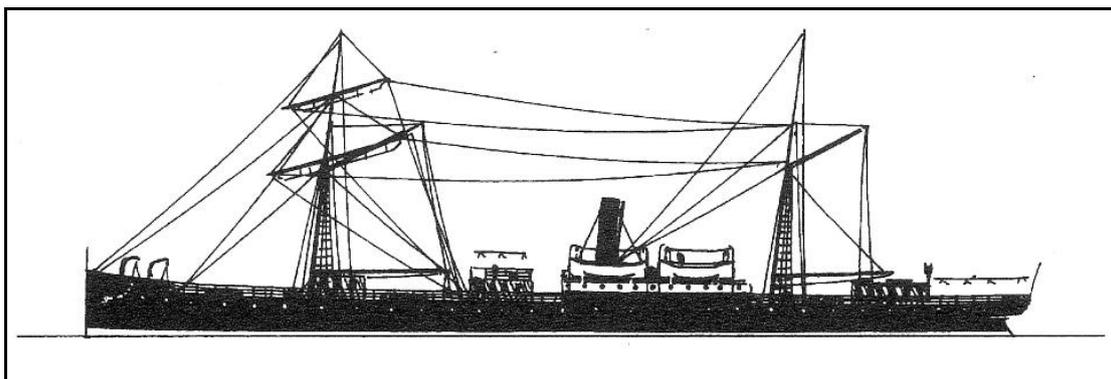
Tamsui.

*“The Tamsui is rigged as for a schooner, and is of the following dimensions:- length 248 ft 9in: breadth of beam 31ft 3 in: depth of hold 23 ft 1 in. Her gross tonnage is 1,424 and the net register 919 tons, and her carrying capacity is equal to 1,800 tons. The loading and discharge of cargo is carried on mostly by hand labour instead of steam and, curiously enough, with quite as quick results. The freight is taken in and out at large side ports and there are convenient stages whence the packages are passed from hand to hand with surprising rapidity. So quickly is the work accomplished that a steamer like the Tamsui can discharge 1,600 to 1,800 tons in 12 hours and load with equal despatch. **(With Australian wharfies???)** The hull of the Tamsui is on the cellular principle or double bottomed, for water ballast. She was built in 1880 by Messrs Scott & Co of Greenock who also constructed her engines, which are of the improved modern type and of the compound type, surface condensing and with inverted cylinders. These are 23in and 56in respectively, and have a length stroke of 42in. The engines are of 160 horse power nominal, and on a consumption of 14 or 15 tons of coal per day a speed of 10 knots is obtained. The bridge deck and the captain's quarters are well forward, and in a large and roomy deckhouse aft there is comfortably furnished accommodation for some six or eight saloon passengers. The tween decks can be easily arranged for the accommodation of a large number of Chinese passengers, if required. The crew, numbering 33, are Chinamen.”*

Hoihow.

“She was built at Greenock in 1880 by Scott & Co. Her length is 248 feet 9 inches, breadth 31 feet 3 inches, depth 23 feet 2 inches, registered tonnage 896 tons. Her engines, which are of the improved modern type are of 160 horse-power nominal. There is saloon passenger accommodation on board in a comfortably furnished saloon aft for two or three passengers. In addition to her saloon accommodation, she has room for 100 Chinese. The crew, numbering 33, are Chinamen.”

Whampoa, Changchow, Taiwan & Woosung.



Whampoa, Changchow, Taiwan & Woosung.

Whampoa.

“The Whampoa was built in October of last year (1882) by Scott and Co, of Greenock, to the order of the China Steam Navigation Company, and has up till the present been running between Shanghai, Hong Kong and Saigon, in the passenger and cargo traffic. She is schooner rigged, is built on splendid lines, and is certainly one of the cleanest vessels that has ever come into this port. She is of 1100 tons net register and of the following dimensions Length, 275ft: beam 34 ft and depth of hold 23ft. Her hull is steel plated throughout. She has a plumb stern and is schooner rigged. There are two decks, one wooden and the other of iron. The vessel can stow 1800 tons of cargo, which she carries on a draught of 18ft forward and about 19ft aft. She steams at an average rate of eleven knots per hour on a consumption of 18 tons of fuel per day. There are two water ballast tanks, one aft (195 tons) and the other amidships (263 tons), which is sufficient to stiffen her in the most tempestuous weather. These are so arranged as to be capable of carrying water, cargo, or coals as may be required. The engines were constructed by the builders, Scott and Co. They are direct acting compound, the diameter of the cylinder being 30 in and 60 in, with 3 ft 6in length of strokes.. Her engines are of 185 hp nominal. There is every facility for expedition in discharging or loading cargo, there being three large holds each supplied with a powerful steam winch of the latest design. The vessel is provided with steam steering gear, which can be used either from the bridge or the wheelhouse, and there is also a patent wheel over the screw.

The Whampoa was constructed principally for carrying cargo and the space set apart for passengers is therefore limited but nevertheless the accommodation is of the best description. The vessel has accommodation for 8 saloon, 16 second cabin, and 24 third-class passengers, while any number of Chinese can be provided for in the 'tween decks. The saloon and all the officer's quarters are amidships on the main deck. They are very roomy, well fitted up and scrupulously clean. The saloon is profusely ornamented and well lighted and ventilated There is a second cabin aft fitted with all due regard to comfort and containing berths for twenty passengers. The captain and officers cabins are also on deck. The Whampoa has three officers and three engineers. There are four Manilla men as quarter-masters: the rest of the crew are Chinese, -forty-six in number.”

Changchow.

This vessel is the second of the steel screw steamers, which have been set apart by the China Navigation Co and Messrs Swire and Co, of London, for trading between China and these colonies. The first to arrive here was the Whampoa. She was thought a good deal of for her appearance and equipment and she was considered moreover, a very fitting boat for the purpose for which she was intended. The Changchow is a fine-looking steel vessel of 1109 tons register, two masted and schooner rigged, built in 1882 by Messrs Scott, of Greenock. Her dimensions are length, 271 ft 3 in breadth of beam, 24 ft 4 in depth of hold, 28 ft 6 in. Her builders also constructed the engines, which are compound inverted cylindrical, the diameter of the cylinders being 30 in and 60 in respectively, with a length of stroke of 42 in. Her boilers are 185 horse power nominal, and if there are any differences between these steamers it is that the Chang Chow has slightly the advantage in horse power.

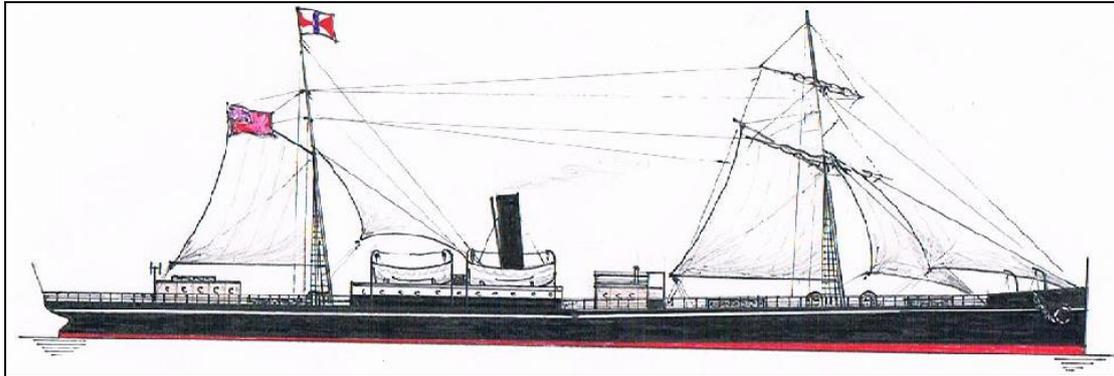
She is built as a cargo carrying vessel, and therefore has but a limited amount of accommodation for passengers, for whose convenience, however, very comfortable provision has been made on the main deck

Taiwan.

The Tai Wan is a steel screw steamer and like others of her fleet, was built by Scott and Co. of Greenock where she was launched on the 18th October 1882. She is constructed on the principle, which is rapidly coming into favour again, of allowing plenty of beam. It is found to answer well in boats running in the river and coasting trade of China and is preferred to the long, narrow hull. The Tai Wan is also a new boat, and is in the first year of her career. In length she measures 271 ft 3-10ths, her beam being 34 ft 4-10ths and depth of hold 23 ft 6-10ths. According to builders measurement she is 1,734 tons and the net register is 1100 tons, while the tween-deck space is 1,025 tons. Her hull is double bottomed. The engines, also by Scott and Co, of Greenock, are compound, direct-acting, and surface condensing. The cylinders, two in number, are inverted. The high pressure is 30 inches and the low pressure 60 inches in diameter, and the piston stroke is 42 inches. The engines are of 190 horse power nominal and the ordinary speed is from 10 ½ to 11 knots. This is obtained on a minimum consumption of coal.

The Taiwan can accommodate ten saloon passengers in double cabins, all accommodation for Europeans being on deck, in teak wood houses built on steel frames; they are fitted with steam steering gear, and all the latest appliances for reception and discharge of cargo; steel hawsers and tow lines. The arrangements for unmooring are very complete, each boat being fitted with Harfield and Co's patent windlass, by which, with 45 fathoms of chain out they can un-moor and sling the anchor into carrying position in 17 minutes. The upper decks are built of 3 in. teak planks resting on steel deck. No cargo, except that of too bulky a character goes over the main deck, all being received and discharged through side ports on the main, decks. The lower holds are fitted with stages, enabling all ordinary loading to be received and discharged with every facility, and without the usual derricks and winches. For heavier and bulky cargo, these latter, of the most improved kind, are provided. The vessels carry tanks capable of holding 165 tons of water ballast, which can be used for carrying cargo, and which like the holds are fitted with stages for loading and unloading. The fore-part of each vessel is fitted with steel breakwater bulwarks, four feet high, which prevent in a great measure, heavy seas from coming on board.

Woosung.

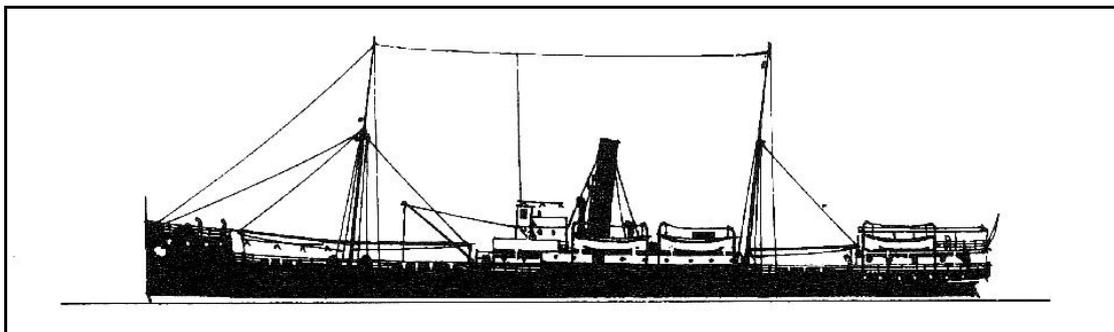


Woosung

Woosung.

Woosung was built in 1882 by Scott and Co., of Greenock. She is 271 feet over all, 34 feet beam by 23 ft. 6 in. deep. The passenger accommodation consists of a small saloon equal to ten first-class, and second class berths for sixteen, but the whole of the 'tween-decks may be used for the transport of 700 people if necessary. She can carry 2,600 tons of tea, and has a double bottom fitted with water ballast. The hull is in five watertight compartments, and all manual labour is economized as far as possible by the introduction of steam gear. The crew are all Chinamen, only a few Europeans being on board as officers, and, judging from appearances, the vessel is certainly in excellent order and very cleanly kept.

Soochow & Hangchow.



Soochow & Hangchow.

The Soochow is one of the latest additions to the company's fleet, having been launched from the building yard of Messrs. Scott and Co., of Greenock, seven months ago. She was built specially for the coasting trade of China, and is therefore intended for a cargo carrier pure and simple; but her 'tween decks are lofty, and she is so well ventilated that a large number of Chinese can be carried in that part of the ship. Her dimensions are as follows. Length, 259ft. 7/10ths; beam, 33ft. 1/10th, and depth of hold, 23ft. 2/10 ths. She is a steel screw steamer of 999 tons register, and 1,572 tons gross measurement with a carrying capacity of about 2200 tons of dead weight. The hull is built from a good model, is straight stemmed, and has an elliptical stern. It is partitioned off by four watertight bulkheads and the bottom is cellular. The tanks are

equal to the reception of 410 tons of water ballast. The hatches are capacious and steam winches and derricks are provided for cargo haulage and large hatchways and sideports also permit this being handled with facility. The Soochow has a bridge amidships, under which the officers and engineers have quarters, and in a house forward the commander's cabin and the dining saloon for the officers are situated. The vessel is driven by a pair of compound surface condensing engines of 150 horse-power nominal, with cylinders of 29 inches and 58 inches in diameter respectively; Her piston stroke is 42in. and steam is generated in two steel boilers, carrying a working pressure of 80lb to the square inch, and fitted with Foxe's patent corrugated furnaces. The winches, windlass, are all of the latest pattern and Hastie's patent is used for the steam steering. Altogether the Soochow is a compact handy boat of the useful order.

Hangchow.

She is a fine new vessel, only four years old, built specially for the China trade having been launched at Cardsdyke, Greenock, by Scott and Co. in September 1885. She is a well-found two masted iron steamer, of 1,000 tons net register, and 2500 tons burden, rigged as a topsail schooner. She is fitted with compound surface condensing engines of 800-horse power nominal, the diameter of the cylinders being 29in and 58in respectively, with a length of stroke of 42in. which give her an average speed of ten knots upon the very moderate consumption of eighteen tons of coal per day. Her hull is of mild steel, and altogether she is a handsome vessel. As stated before she was built as a cargo boat, and in consequence has very little passenger accommodation. The vessel has a neat appearance, all her deckhouses being situated amidships, which leaves her deck, fore and aft, without encumbrance. The officers are quartered on the main deck in nice large rooms. The bridge deck is 52ft, and that of the forecastle deck 31ft.

The Hangchow is 999 tons net, and 1572 tons gross register, and of the following dimensions —259 ft 7in long, 33ft 1in beam, and 23ft 2in depth of hold.